

Neighborhood Grapevine

News from the City of Milwaukee's
Department of Neighborhood Services



Students from Frederick Douglass Elementary school pick up litter in their neighborhood with some help from Mayor John Norquist.

City Still Picking Up After December Snows

by Todd Weiler

The City of Milwaukee was buried under a record amount of snow this past December. The ice and snow has melted now and all the garbage and litter that was frozen in place is now blowing about. The Department of Neighborhood Services issues clean up orders through the efforts of the Vector Nuisance inspectors.

Now that spring has arrived, a number of new initiatives have been started to deal with this challenge. Several news conferences were conducted to urge the public to clean up around their garbage cart and help starve a rat. A new door hanger was used to draw attention to the order to clean up the problem. As a result, there was a 10% increase in compliance with the clean-up orders.

Dave Krey, manager of the DNS Environmental Health Section credits the media campaign and the educational efforts of community organizers with making people understand why the litter clean up is needed. While the short term results are encouraging, a number of long term strategies are under way. One of them is FREE bags for clean-ups from Keep Greater Milwaukee Beautiful (KGMB).

KGMB coordinates the Great American Clean-up Day which was on April 28th this year. Locally, 3,000 volunteers will clean up local parks

New Facade ordinance seeks public input

City of Milwaukee officials want you to look at a proposed ordinance that will require periodic inspection of high-rise building facades by licensed professionals. Recently, several buildings in downtown Milwaukee have lost parts of their facades. Fortunately, no people have been injured. Building officials in Milwaukee are proposing a system to inspect the facades and address maintenance issues.

According to the March 2000 Construction Specifier, "masonry falls off a building facade somewhere in the United States about every three weeks. Over the past few years in the U.S. at least 49 such masonry failures have killed 30 persons and 81 injured (*sic*)."

The public is invited to participate in the process of building the ordinance. Those interested can preview the proposed ordinance at the City of Milwaukee's website <www.ci.mil.wi.us> The complete proposal is available for review and can be downloaded or printed out. Architects, engineers, builders, developers, building owners and the public are encouraged to review the proposal. Owners with buildings that are 5 or more stories high will be affected by the regulation. Currently, there is no national standard for high-rise facade inspection, but other major cities like New York, Detroit, Boston, Chicago, and Columbus have a similar law. The proposed inspection schedule would be phased in with the oldest buildings subject to inspection first. In three years, beginning in 2002, old buildings would be added to the list incrementally until all 5-story buildings, except those 15 years or newer, will be inspected every five years. DNS staff working on the project are Marty Collins and Tracy Williams.

An informational hearing is scheduled for May 9, 2001, 2-4 PM, at City Hall, Room 301-B. The public is invited to present their comments at the hearing. Input from the hearing will be used to develop the final code.

Prior to the hearing, comments on the ordinance can be e-mailed to: (mcolli@ci.mil.wi.us) or they can be mailed to Dept. of Neighborhood Services, 841 N. Broadway RM1008, Milwaukee, WI 53202 ☺

See Sack-it-To-Me page 2



North Pole? No. Just an unshoveled alley in April that made garbage collection impossible. While many streets were passable, alleys were not.



Crows and other "vectors" feeding on loose garbage in March. Unshoveled carts went unemptied resulting in a serious cleanup effort required in spring.

Environmental Health Section Update

by Dave Krey

We have had a very interesting winter weather season which will make way for a very busy spring and summer. Combine extremely heavy snowfalls with prolonged periods of cold, then add a large dollop of garbage, and you have what looks like garbage bombs exploding in various neighborhoods throughout the city.

With the presence of garbage comes the appearance of Mr. *rattus norvegicus* AKA Norway rat. Rats appear to be thriving with the abundant food source available to them. Look around the alleys and backyards and you'll see that garbage is everywhere. The heavy snowfalls and failure of many residents to shovel out the carts prevented prompt and complete garbage removal.

DNS staff have been out focusing on the problem areas but many areas still look terrible. There have been several media inquiries into the litter problem along with a recent press conference which attempted to educate and motivate the public into taking some action. You've probably seen Mayor Norquist shoveling out a garbage cart or seen Marty's smiling face on the tube preaching the virtues of proper garbage disposal to stop feeding this wildlife. Also playing a big part in the clean-up effort were temporarily reassigned staff from both Code Enforcement Sections who made a large dent by issuing over 600 orders to property owners.

The Common Council has formed a Litter Task Force with the mission of evaluating current methods and efforts used to reduce litter in the city and to make recommendations on how to improve these efforts. The Task Force has allowed DNS to try some new things, including better coordination and use of Sanitation personnel to aid in clean-ups, drawing upon staff from other DNS sections to assist during emergency times, and coordinating better with Community Based Organizations in mobilizing citizens to clean their properties. Many such community cleanups are being planned.

The latest DNS effort involves placing a door hanger on the property that serves as a stern warning to the tenants that they may face charges or citations if they fail to clean-up the litter. In addition, 5 temporary staff came on board April 2 to assist with the heavy workload. As a result, the City is already in a lot better shape in a May than what we feared it might have been in January. ☺

SACK-IT-TO-ME from page 1

and other public areas. As many as 50,000 people participated in some form of a clean-up in the greater Milwaukee metro area. Those interested in cleaning their neighborhood can get the free bags by calling 272-5462. Milwaukee has a world famous reputation for being a clean city. The national Great American Clean-up is modeled after the program Milwaukee created and has been conducting for years.

Department of Neighborhood Service Commissioner Martin Collins said, "Garbage removal is an essential city service, and failure to remove the garbage in a timely manner may result in adverse health conditions to the citizens of Milwaukee, as well as a potential increase in the rat population. Our enforcement efforts will continue, but residents are the key." DNS conducts 10,500 nuisance inspections resulting in 5,100 orders each year. Of those orders 2,000 property owners failed to take action, and the City hired a crew to do the clean up with the cost added to the tax bill.

In April, the Department of Public Works (DPW) Sanitation Bureau started 23 heavy street-sweeping shifts that continued through the month. In May, 21 shifts will hit the street continuing through October. Nine DPW skid loaders are picking up garbage full time. Seventeen special directed pickups are planned for this year as well as some immediate clean-up programs in the area of Congress to Oklahoma from Humboldt to 51st Street. Community organizers will be going door to door alerting residents to bring out big items and clean up their yards. Bagged trashed and big items will be picked up quickly on the day posted on the hanger. Neighborhood clean-ups with dumpsters can be arranged by contacting individual aldermen. ☺

**WANT TO DO A CLEANUP?
NEED FREE BAGS?
CALL KEEP GREATER MILWAUKEE BEAUTIFUL
272-5462**



AFFORDABLE HOME OWNERSHIP IN MILWAUKEE

by Arnoldo Sevilla

First-time homebuyers are finding a very affordable market on the northwest side of Milwaukee with the help of NIDC staff. Thanks to creative financing and marketing, Willis and Kimberlee Wayach, former southside renters, became first time home owners at the former North Meadows condominiums. Their total monthly mortgage payment, which includes taxes and condo fees, is \$400. That is less than what they were paying in rent! William, an employee of Alexian Village, will now be happily within biking or walking distance from his new home to work. The closing was done very quickly in a record 21 days by St. Francis Bank, F.S.B. This is the first NIDC closing in North Meadows.

These condos are the best affordable housing in the state, with units selling between \$18,000 - \$25,000! North Meadows is located on the far northwest side of Milwaukee, between West Brown Deer Road and West Allyn St., and from North 91st to North 95th Streets. Substantial changes brought about by a new and aggressive board of directors has resulted in the removal of many negative factors that formerly plagued this condominium complex.

New potential buyers can get more information by calling Arnoldo Sevilla at 286-5606 or Michelle Washington at 358-1927. ☺



No longer paying rent! Kimberlee and Willis Wayach, former southside renters, join NIDC specialist Arnoldo Sevilla at their new home in Woodlands! The NIDC staff assist in finding new home opportunities in Milwaukee.

Targeting Resources Produces Big Changes in Lindsay Heights

For the past several years the Lindsay Heights Neighborhood, bounded by 12th, Walnut, 20th, and Locust streets, has been a target for reinvestment in a joint effort involving DCD, DNS, NIDC, and WHEDA and the WAICO YMCA. Much has been accomplished, including:

- 28 new homes adding over \$3 million of new investment and tax base.
- 122 homes rehabbed, an investment of over \$2.2 million.
- 31 vacant homes rehabbed and sold to owner occupants, an investment of over \$3 million.
- 26.4% increase in property values since 1996.
- Blighted properties removed.

Building on this success, local stakeholders, along with NIDC, WHEDA, DCD, and WAICO-Y have worked to create a plan for future development. Elements of the plan now being implemented include:

- Tax Incremental Financing District (TID) to provide additional development resources.
- Clustering activities to build on strengths and create a visible neighborhood impact.
- New construction, including a variety of styles and both modular-built and panelized-built housing.
- A joint marketing program to encourage additional construction and investment.
- Targeted code enforcement to encourage the repair of existing properties.

When you are out in the neighborhood, especially around 14th and Garfield, or 14th and Reservoir, take a look at all the good things that are happening. ☺

NIDC or DNS? What's the difference?

Why does NIDC have a different logo, letterhead, and business cards if we're all part of the same Department of Neighborhood Services?

That's a question that comes up periodically, and the answer is a really a simple one – 'Our attorneys told us to do it'.

While, as employees, we're all part of the Department of Neighborhood Services, NIDC is, in fact, a separate legal corporation. At the time of the creation of DNS and again recently, we asked whether it wouldn't be better to unify staff and have a single set of letterhead, business cards, and shirt logos. Each time the answer from the attorneys has been the same. Paraphrased, the advice has been that, from a legal standpoint, it is important to maintain both the reality and the appearance that DNS and NIDC are two separate legal entities. ☺

NIDC Board Charts New Course

Working with a study recently completed by the certified public accounting firm of Virchow Krause LLC, the NIDC Board participated in a planning session facilitated by VK to review the study and set the direction for the future structure of NIDC. While the planning is still in process, there are several changes being made at the board level. First, new by-laws are being written to modernize the structure and make-up of the board. Second, the board will become more active in the planning process and the evaluation of the results of NIDC's activities. Third, the board wants NIDC to take a more active role in the broader issues associated with City-wide housing policy issues. Fourth, the composition of the board will be changing to include members with legal and fiscal backgrounds as well as ensuring community representation. ☺

WANTED: GENERAL CONTRACTORS

NIDC housing rehabilitation staff are involved in an initiative to recruit general contractors who are certified by the State of Wisconsin as lead contractors. The objective is to assist homeowners and property owners in locating qualified, responsible contractors to bid on the millions of dollars of construction work generated annually by NIDC. A listing of these contractors will be made available to homeowners and investment property owners.

A committee has met weekly since January to develop a system to recruit and evaluate contractors who can act as a general contractor and also handle lead based paint issues. The committee is currently accepting contractor applications. Any contractors interested in applying to be added to the list can contact Mike Sedlar at 286-8011.

The release of the Lead Certified General Contractor List is anticipated shortly. ☺



KEEN EYED STAFF SAVES OVER \$10,000

Marge Piwaron in the Administration Section of DNS does the bidding for the demolition of City owned buildings acquired through tax foreclosure. When a badly deteriorated commercial building was bid, there was an initial attempt by DCD to save the foundation for reuse. When that decision was reversed, they requested that we add the foundation to the contract as an extra. Marge thought it through and figured out a way to rebid the contract. The result was a savings of over \$10,000. Kudos to Marge for making DNS's efforts to provide services faster and less expensively a reality! ☺

SPOUTING OFF! Connection Confusion Reigns

by Todd Weiler

The rains are coming this spring and with them the fear of water in many basements. There are a number of efforts under way to avoid those wet woes.

One of the proposed solutions is a pilot program to divert the pure rain water from the Milwaukee sewer system. The majority of Milwaukee homes are connected to a combination sanitary and storm water sewer system. The pilot project is going to study the effects of diverting the rain water and thus delay its entry into the system.

Recent media reports have erroneously given the public the impression that anyone can now disconnect their downspouts in Milwaukee. That is wrong! Simply put...this is an invitation-only party!

An initial plan has been drawn up by the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewage District (MMSD) and DPW. A target area map has been coordinated between the two agencies. This spring, about 287 home owners in an area between Downer, Bradford, Locust and Wahl streets were sent a letter inviting the homeowners to disconnect from the sewers. The owner is being offered about \$50 per spout to disconnect two spouts. Buildings of owners who agree to the plan are reviewed as to the ability to divert the water on the owner's property, the impact on neighboring yards, and the amount of surface area impacted. DPW will monitor the disconnections. The Department of Neighborhood Services Plumbing section is charged with handling any violations.

The combined sewer system has many complexities for neighborhoods. During normal dry spells the sanitary sewer carries all of the sewage to Jones Island for treatment. Combined sewers can overload during heavy rains. Valves then divert the water to the deep tunnel or other overflow systems in the Metropolitan Interceptor System.

There are few perfect solutions for homeowners. Plugging the basement drain to keep sewage from backing up may work...that is until roof rain water behind the plug is unable to get out. Also sewage will come out of the next highest drain in the home if flooding is severe.

The best advice is to move valuables to higher ground. The Plumbing Section can provide advice on alternatives. A licensed plumber with a permit is required to do any modifications to a sewer or water system on a property.

Other solutions are covered on the DNS web site with advice to homeowners faced with a flooding situation. Go to the main city site at <http://www.ci.mil.wi.us>. Then go to the City Departments page and click on Neighborhood Services' Plumbing Section. ☺

DID YOU KNOW....?



COMING SOON! The Department of Neighborhood Services inspects and monitors all swimming pools in the City of Milwaukee. Thank a DNS inspector for that cool and SAFE dip this summer.

What's New in Plumbing Section?

by the Plumbing Office Staff

The plumbing inspectors are now using the reinspection fee letters to alert the owners who received the orders that time is running out. This letter system is working. The owners are calling the inspectors about what to do and how to correct these violations to avoid the re-inspection fees. Because of the response to these letters, there are a smaller number of orders that are going to the Court Section.

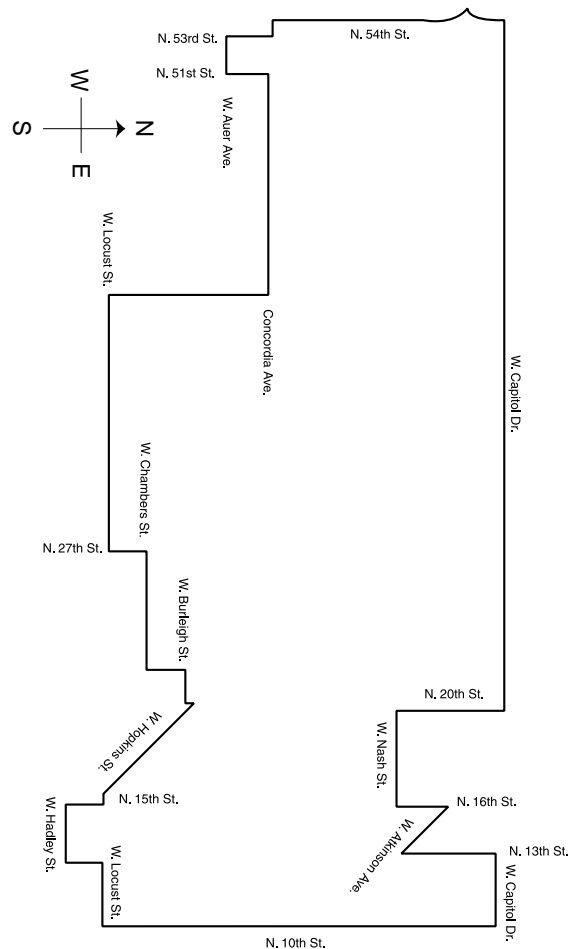
On January 1, 2001, the new billing system was initiated. The additional-fee letter is generated on the NSS and sent to the contractor. When the letter is generated, a \$ (dollar sign) is entered under "status". The permit remains open until the fee is paid to the Development Center. After payment is made, those permits are then finalized out. Those contractors who have not paid their bills are put on a "stop" list.

The Dept. of Buildings & Fleet approached the Plumbing Inspection Section to provide a list of all plumbing devices that require yearly performance tests. After being supplied with addresses of all city-owned buildings that have these devices, our cross-connection inspectors will be able to give DPW a count of how many there are in each building, what type of device that is installed, size, serial number and location. This is possible through a computer program set up by our cross-connection inspectors.

Recently, the Wisconsin Department of Commerce approved a new plumbing product which may have a large impact on the plumbing industry. It is described as an air admittance valve and is manufactured by the Studor Company. The purpose of the product, commonly known as the Studor Vent, is to allow air to enter the plumbing system when drains are being used in order to prevent trap siphonage. In effect, it eliminates the need for some of the plumbing vent system and related piping. There are several restrictions on the Studor Vent's use, location and installation practices. It also requires a special test using a manometer to measure pressure differentials in the systems, indicating its proper function. Not to be outdone, another manufacturer has had a similar product approved and several other manufacturers have expressed interest in getting their products approved also. ☺

FRONT DOOR PROGRAM STARTED

At the urging of Alderwoman Rosa Cameron, CDBG funding has been reserved for a special grant program called the Front Door Program. The program is targeted in the Tenth Aldermanic District and is available to low-income owner occupants. The Tenth District is roughly bounded by Interstate 43 on the East and 54th Street on the West between Capitol Drive and Locust Street. Grants up to \$4,000 for repair work are available in limited supply. Work can include exterior carpentry, painting, concrete and landscaping in the front of the house. Over fifty homeowners have already applied to the program. The start of construction activity is anticipated in April. For applications or more information about the Front Door Program, contact Christella at 286-5608. ☺



Front Door Program

DEPARTMENT OF NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES FIRST QUARTER ACTIVITY

<u>Activity</u>	<u>1st Quarter 2000</u>	<u>1st Quarter 2001</u>	<u>% Change</u>
Requests for Service	7,194	8,136	+13%
Violation Records	7,707	10,670	+38%
Permits	6,511	7,019	+8%
NSS Web Lookups	123,053	183,667	+49%



How would you take down a house that hangs over a sidewalk? One of the many challenges facing the DNS-Demolition Section.

What goes up...must come come down? Interesting demolition cases in DNS

by Tracy Williams, Supervisor Condemnation Section

Most of the building types that the Condemnation Section condemns typically are one- or two-family dwellings. Most are condemned due to fire damage or severe vandalism and neglect. Many have old furniture or trash inside. When the specs are written for the bid, they have been standardized to cover the typical demolition requirements. Once in a while, we do get an unusual situation which causes us to revise the specifications. The following are a few of the unique situations we have come across.

A commercial building was recently condemned on North Avenue near 37th Street. The roof had been neglected for years and, therefore, water caused considerable damage throughout the structure. Many parts were unsafe to walk on due to severe rot and deterioration. This was a wood frame building with approximately 3000 square feet of floor area on the first floor. The specifications for the demolition were standard. But once the interior was inspected, we discovered this wasn't your standard wood frame building. This building was originally built for a furrier. The front part of the space was used for showing and selling fur coats. The rear part was used for storage and offices. The interesting part was in the basement. A concrete vault was constructed of approximately 800 square feet. There was also a room for a cooling system that connected to this concrete vault. This vault was used to store fur coats during the summer (non-fur-coat-wearing season). This vault would be more difficult and time consuming to demolish and had to be flagged in the specifications.

A few years ago, a commercial five-story warehouse/factory was condemned on the corner of 31st and Cherry Street. This building had been neglected for years. The roof had deteriorated and, due to water damage, part of it had failed. Many of the floors throughout the building were unsafe to walk on. This building was built into the side of a hill along a railroad track. The building was constructed of heavy timber type framing with masonry walls. In the past it was used as a factory that made disposable cloths used in other industrial/commercial businesses. To make the cloths, they used old clothing or rags. Therefore, when we inspected the building, there were piles of rags on many of the lower floors. Because the floors were built

Apartment Association of South - eastern Wisconsin donates 1,200 batteries to DNS

Missing or worn out smoke detector batteries place families and properties at a greater risk of serious harm from even small fires. The Apartment Association of Southeastern Wisconsin recently donated 1,152 nine volt smoke detector batteries to the City of Milwaukee Department of Neighborhood Services. Now when inspectors find a missing smoke detector battery they can provide the tenant with a battery, thereby avoiding writing an order on the owner and providing immediate protection for the occupants and the property.

This is an example of how we can cooperatively work with the private sector to solve problems in a cost effective manner. ☺

SMOKE DETECTOR ORDERS WRITTEN BY DNS



1998- 1775

1999- 1669

2000- 2438

into the side of the hill, it was very dark, and using only flashlights, we were limited as to what we could see. After the project was bid and awarded, the demolition contractor asked us to take another look at some of the rag piles. It turns out that two of the lower floors were partially filled with solid rags/old clothes. These old clothes were bundled very tightly and were approximately six feet long by six feet high. There were hundreds of these bundles. Because it was difficult to inspect, no one knew just how much was there. Needless to say, the contractor asked for extra money for the removal of these rags.

Recently, we condemned a single-family dwelling at 128 E. Hadley due to severe fire damage. This is a single family dwelling, wood frame – should be a standard demolition, right? NO! The demolition of this dwelling will be complicated because this dwelling is unique in how it is situated on the site. First of all, there is a separate two-family dwelling in the front part of the lot along Palmer St. and the condemned dwelling is in the rear of this lot. This lot was split into separate parcels with separate owners many years ago. Second, this dwelling was built on a hill and sits up off of Hadley Street where the base of this house starts at eight feet above the sidewalk. There is a stone retaining wall along Hadley Street to keep the property stable. Third, the hill continues to ascend upward from the north property line of this property. Finally, this dwelling CANTILEVERS over the sidewalk along Hadley Street. A bay window and side porch is supported by brackets, which project approximately four feet from the retaining wall over the sidewalk. Because this dwelling is uniquely situated on the site, we will be conducting an on-site walk through with any interested contractors that wish to bid on the demolition. With their help and suggestions, we will then write the specifications for the demolition of this dwelling. ☺

City of Milwaukee

Abandoned and Nuisance Vehicle Summary

by Donald I. Schaewe, Nuisance Control and Environmental Health Supervisor, Department of Neighborhood Services

Nuisance and abandoned vehicles in the city of Milwaukee are negative influences on neighborhoods. They can be health hazards, traffic hazards and tend to reduce property values. Along with litter and debris, nothing sends a more negative message about a neighborhood than nuisance and abandoned vehicles.

The distinction of what constitutes an abandoned vehicle from a nuisance vehicle is important. An abandoned vehicle is one that has been deserted by its owner regardless of its location or condition. Whether an abandoned vehicle is left on the street, alley or private property, the jurisdiction governing its removal (by City ordinance) belongs to the Department of Public Works' Parking Enforcement Division (specifically the Parking Checkers). If a vehicle is left on private property, the definitive word on whether it is abandoned usually belongs to the property owner. Property owners who want to report an abandoned vehicle on their own property should call 286-8350. They may sign a form called an "application for removal" that will allow the City to tow the vehicle at no charge to themselves.

A nuisance vehicle is one that, according to its condition and location, make it a health and safety threat. A nuisance vehicle is only located on private property. Any problem vehicle located on the street, alley or sidewalk regardless of its condition is considered abandoned and is handled by Parking Enforcement. If the vehicle on private property is inoperable or has windows missing or, in some cases, has a combination of parking violations (parked on unapproved surface or has no plates), it is considered a nuisance. The Department of Neighborhood Services orders this type of vehicle to be repaired or removed.

Usually DNS is made aware of this type of vehicle from a source other than the property owner. The reason for this is because property owners are allowed by ordinance to take advantage of DPW's application for removal as discussed above by declaring the vehicle abandoned. DPW will remove these abandoned, nuisance vehicles after a 72 hour notification period (via a placard to any interested parties).

In contrast and in the absence of any word from the property owner about the status of a vehicle, DNS conducts its notification while the vehicle remains on the property. This is because at the end of the notification period (and if the vehicle remained in the same or worse condition) DNS will have the vehicle towed and destroyed on the same day. The charges for this tow are placed on the tax rolls (about \$225).

Occasionally DNS runs through most of the process of ordering a nuisance vehicle (reported by someone other than the property owner) repaired or removed only to receive a call from the property owner indicating that it is present without his permission.

A situation thereby arises that causes a vehicle not only to be a nuisance but abandoned as well. In this and only this instance has DPW delegated authority to DNS to effect the removal of an abandoned vehicle.

DNS will provide the property owner the opportunity to sign an application for removal indicating that the vehicle is there without his permission or after his permission for it to be present has been rescinded. The vehicle is then removed from



the property without charge to the property owner. In order to avail himself of the DNS application for removal, the property owner must immediately contact the inspector who issued the order.

Failure to respond immediately to the order and submit a completed application for removal prior to referral for towing will cause the vehicle to be towed with the associated charges to be placed on the tax rolls. The inspector's telephone number and office hours are located on the order and placard (sticker placed on the vehicle).

If a property owner wishes to report a nuisance vehicle on a property other than his own, he may call the Department of Neighborhood Services at 286-2268.

The following is a simple test that a property owner can use to determine which City agency he should call to report a problem vehicle:

1. Is the vehicle on the street, alley or sidewalk? If yes, call DPW at 286-8350.
2. Is the vehicle abandoned on my own property? If yes, call DPW at 286-8350. Declare it an abandoned vehicle present without my permission and request that it be removed without cost to me.
3. Is the vehicle on a private property other than my own? If yes, call DNS at 286-2268 and report it as a potential nuisance vehicle.

Please remember that if you receive a nuisance vehicle order from a DNS inspector, call his listed telephone number on the same day that you receive the order to ensure that you can sign an application for removal to save yourself \$225.00. Together we can improve the quality of the neighborhoods in which we live, work, and own property. ☺

DNS How to reach us



286-3646 1673 S. 9th St, 3rd floor
286-3441 841 N. Broadway 10th floor
286-8212 Neighborhood Improvement Development Corp.

**Have a contribution for the April edition of the
DNS GRAPEVINE? Deadline August 15, 2001
Email it to Todd Weiler, Editor: tweile@ci.mil.wi.us**

Citywide Housing Coalition and DNS Conduct Community Code Enforcement Program

by Al Garcia, Residential Section

With impetus from the then Department of Building Inspection (BI), a stronger linkage between neighborhood groups involved in residential "windshield" surveys and this department was forged in the mid-1990's. The partnership resulted in funding from the Community Block Grant Administration (CBGA) for four non-profit organizations involved in the process.

The funding supported four staff positions charged with recruiting and training resident volunteers to increase survey activity throughout the block grant area. The four organizations were also provided with computers and a direct connection to the department's data base. The unique informational linkage was before the Internet phenomena and represented a creative partnership between the municipality and its neighborhood organizations.

In 2001, the initiative is going strong and has resulted in the Citywide Housing Coalition, community groups and neighborhood volunteers concerned about quality of life issues. The condition of residential housing is a strong barometer of the overall health of a neighborhood and the obvious connection with DNS has made for a strong and mutually beneficial relationship.

To better illustrate, DNS liaison staff schedule a major survey in all involved neighborhoods in spring, usually early May when the weather breaks. The surveys are generally conducted during one week-end. Volunteers use one-page survey sheets that deal primarily with obvious repair needs, such as painting, porch repairs, broken windows, etc.

Because of the volunteer aspect of the process, "windshield" surveys are less obtrusive than sidewalk inspections, which may involve confrontations with other homeowners unnecessarily.

Properties with apparent code violations are then sent "friendly" letters from their neighborhood group indicating that the property was informally surveyed and that there may be resources available to help pay for the repairs. A contact person is named in the letter.

The impact of the spring survey is not realized until the fall re-survey. Volunteers once again revisit the properties cited to assess results. As an example, more than 1,100 letters were mailed out by the Coalition following the initial 2001 survey. The re-inspection identified more than 500 properties repaired or that repairs were under way.

Depending on the situation, second letters may be sent to owners who fail to respond to initial requests. Tougher cases usually involving absentee owners are turned over to DNS for more intensive enforcement.

The importance of this initiative has resulted in CBGA including residential housing surveys as a mandated activity for all its funded organizing groups during 2001. A training meeting for organizing groups and the Citywide Housing Coalition-DNS to describe the survey process was held Monday, March 26th at the Hillside Resource Center.

The continued relationship between DNS and the numerous community groups involved in residential surveys not only benefits our housing stock, but also more importantly, positively impacts the quality of life of our citizens and maximizes collective citizen-municipal "clout" when addressing critical housing issues. ☺

Commissioner's Corner

Chronic Nuisance Property Ordinance

by DNS Commissioner Martin G. Collins



You may have read in the newspapers about a new ordinance that was adopted recently called the Chronic Nuisance Property Code. While the long version is in Section 80-10 of the Code, the short version of how it works is this: If 3 or more nuisances from a list of 20 nuisance activities occur on a premises within a 30 day period, the MPD may contact the owner, provide them with detailed information as to what happened at their property and ask for a plan to stop the nuisance activity from continuing. If no plan is submitted or it is not acceptable and the owner fails to appeal that determination all further police calls to that property where MPD determines that such additional nuisance activities occurred will result in the cost of those calls being placed on the owner's property tax bill. Incidents reported by the owner to MPD will not count.

The list of nuisance activities range from shots fired, loitering, battery, gambling and public drinking to drug sales and prostitution. A mere complaint about such activity is not sufficient to trigger the code as the police need probable cause to believe that the activity actually occurred. Per State Statute, all Wisconsin leases contain a prohibition of the use of a rental property for illegal purposes. It is hoped that responsible owners will use the information provided by the MPD to exercise their rights to prevent a reoccurrence. As noted in the most recent edition of "OWNER" magazine, good tenants like to live in proximity with other good tenants so the ordinance will allow the landlord to solve a problem before the good tenants move out.

How is DNS involved? I was the ordinance's initiator and one of the principal authors. It is based on a combination of our noise ordinance and a Portland Oregon code that came to my attention through my participation with the American Association of Code Enforcement. We have good data to show that our noise ordinance has been effective in reducing noise from party houses. After one year, the recidivism rate for property owners sent notices was 3%. Our role is to place the police costs on the tax roll if needed.

Why is DNS involved? People invest in neighborhoods when they perceive them to be "good neighborhoods" We enforce building and property maintenance codes that affect that perception but nothing affects a neighborhood's perception more than crime, especially those illegal activities described as nuisances in this code. By working to remove such nuisances from a neighborhood, our job of encouraging reinvestment and repair is made easier and more effective.

The MPD is about to start using the new code. We will soon learn whether this new tool can be effective in reducing nuisance activity as the noise code has been. ☺